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ABSTRACT

As the world becomes more global, communicating with people from other cultures becomes a necessity. The cultural mix challenges individuals to improve their knowledge and skills in intercultural communication. This course proposal describes a 3-credit course designed to introduce students to the basic concepts, theories, and practices of intercultural communication. Among the subject matters to be covered in the course are elements of cultural systems, values, and beliefs; social identification and group relations; influence of culture; language and culture; nonverbal communication and culture; intercultural negotiation; intercultural conflict resolution; and mass media and intercultural communication. The course will study and analyze cultures around the world, and intercultural communication will be studied at the levels of interpersonal communication, group communication, organizational communication, public communication, and mass communication. The course lists eight educational objectives. It profiles Israeli Jews as an example of a section of an intercultural communication course, detailing their makeup, religion, and habits, and also discussing non-Jewish minorities in Israel. Contains 26 references. (BT)

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Curriculum Project

Intercultural Communication

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Curriculum Project

Intercultural Communication

Course Title: Intercultural Communication

Course Credit Hours: 3

Course Description:

As the world becomes more and more global, communicating with people from other cultures becomes a necessity. Today, in virtually every facet of our life—in school, work, play, and family—communication with others is marked by cultural diversity. Both domestically and internationally, competent communication has become a key to success. The cultural mix challenges each of us to improve our knowledge and skills of intercultural communication.

This course is designed to introduce students to the basic concepts, theories, and practices of intercultural communication. Among the subject matters covered in this course are elements of cultural systems, values, and beliefs, social identification and group relations, influence of culture, language and culture, nonverbal communication and culture, intercultural negotiation, intercultural conflict resolution, and mass media and intercultural communication. Cultures around the world will be studied and analyzed. Intercultural communication will be studied at the levels of interpersonal communication, group communication, organizational communication, public communication, and mass communication. Communication principles will be applied to intercultural interaction so that misunderstandings, prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination can be reduced or eliminated. In addition to macrocultures, microcultures will also be examined.

Course Objectives:

Upon completing this course, students are expected

- To be able to identify the basic elements of culture and intercultural communication;
- To understand the principles and theories of cultural and intercultural communication;
- To understand the differences between and among macrocultures and microcultures;
- To become aware of the different worldviews that color values, perceptions, and communication patterns;
- To learn the principles and skills of interpersonal, group, and public communication in the context of intercultural communication;

- To learn the vocabulary of cultural sensitivity and to become more aware of cultural diversity;
- To learn to appreciate other cultures; and
- To become more competent in communicating with people of different cultures.

Intercultural Communication among Israelis

(A section in a course of Intercultural Communication)

א. Introduction

Communication between and among people in Israel is marked by its unique and intense intercultural characteristics. A country of six million people, although most of whom are Jewish, Israel has a large population of Muslims and Christians. In addition to the obvious difference between Jews and non-Jews, there are striking differences among Israeli Jews. Reform Jews, observant Jews, and ultraorthodox Jews have different beliefs and practices on religion, language, lifestyle, family structure, education, customs, and beliefs.

ב. Who are the Israelis

Many people believe Israel is a nation of Jews. Although it is true to some extend, Israel is home not only to Judaism, but also to Islam and Christianity. Of the six million people in Israel, 79.8 percent are Jews, 14.7 percent Muslims, 2.1 percent Christians, 1.6 percent Druze and 1.8 percent not classified by religion.

As if the place is not multicultural enough, Israel has absorbed about one million Russian immigrants in the past ten years and many of those immigrants are not Jewish at all. Walking on the streets, staying at a hotel, shopping in malls, one hears Russian spoken everywhere. Besides the Russian language, one also hears Hebrew, Yiddish, Arabic, and English among other languages.

ג. Religion

The multiculturalism is most intensely evidenced in Jerusalem, especially in the Old City. Strolling inside the walls of the Old City, one cannot but feel overwhelmed by the holiness of the place. You hear the bells tolling in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre which marks the site where Jesus was crucified. At about the same time, the call to prayer in Arabic is coming from Muslim mosques. All this is happening while large numbers of Jews are praying in front of the Wailing Wall. Within a mere one square kilometer in radius, you see the holiest site to the Jews, the surviving Western Wall of the Second Temple, destroyed some 2000 years ago; the second most sacred place to Muslims, the Dome of the Rock where Muhammad ascended to heaven (second only to Mecca); and the most sacred place to Christianity, the Church of the Sepulchre. The Old City in Jerusalem is undoubtedly the holiest land in the world.

In Israel today, one of the greatest problems, many believe, is a growing division between secular and religious Jews. While the differences between Christianity, Islam, and Judaism are profound, the difference between secular Jews and religious Jews is

more unsettling and disturbing. The strife between secular Jews and religious Jews is widely recognized as the most acute, compelling conflict diving Israel society today, far superceding any other domestic conflict. Recent polls show that over 80% of Israelis fear civil violence erupting as a result of this tension.

The tension between religious and secular Jews has its roots in the very beginning of the Zionist Movement and the influence of the Enlightment in drawing Jews out of their traditional communities. It has continued as a result of the intertwining of the religion and state.

1. The Different types of Jews

Not all Jews are the same. As the famous saying about Jews goes, "When two Jews meet, there bound to have three opinions." Jews can be categorized into three major groups: the secular Jews, the religious Jews, and the Hassidic or ultraorthodox Jews.

i) The secular Jews

About 70% of the Jews in Israel today are secular Jews. The term "secular" doesn't necessarily mean that they are atheists, although some of them are atheists. Many are not interested in religion, but they are not irreligious either. They may celebrate important Jewish holidays but they don't attend synagogue regularly or follow dietary or other religious laws.

One anecdote tells about secular Jews' belief of messiah. A poor Jew had no job. His children were hungry. He had to find a job to be able to feed his children. One day, he went to the Rabbi and asked if the Rabbi could give him a job. The Rabbi thought for a while and said, "All right, I'll give you a job." The Rabbi told the poor Jew to sit and wait for Messiah to come, and when Messiah comes, tell him.

The poor Jew asked how much he would be paid for doing that. The Rabbi said it would be five shekels a day. The poor Jew said, "But, Rabbi, that's too little." The Rabbi replied," But it's a lifetime job."

Secular Jews don't really believe in Messiah.

ii) The religious Jews

About 20% of the Israeli population are religious Jews or "observant Jews." A religious Jew is defined as "a male who wears a skullcap – a small, round, usually knitted head covering which is worn to obey the Old Testament injunction to cover the head in the sight of God." Religious Jews observe Jewish religious holidays and follow dietary laws, but they are not as strict at the Hassidic Jews.

iii)The Hassidic or Ultraorthodox Jews

About 10% of Jews are Hassidic Jews. Hassidic means righteous or pious in Hebrew. One can tell who is Hassidic Jew and who is not by his appearance. Male Hassidic Jews have curly earlocks (sidelocks) and are dressed in black felt hat, black long coat, some kind of black vest with all sorts of strange white frilly things streaming out of it, and other assorted layers below that. Even in summer with temperature well into the 90s or even above 100 degrees Fahrenheit, Hassidic Jews strictly follow the dress code (See slides).

The earlocks and frilly white things are in fact the results of Biblical injunctions which indeed can be found somewhere in the Old Testament.

The Hassidic Jews are sometimes called ultraorthodox Jews because of the degree of their dedication to Judaism religion. The Hassidic Jews live according to the laws laid down in the Bible. Their number has grown in recent decades through immigration and high birth rates, and with the growth of their number grows their influence. Religious parties now control 23 seats in the 120-seat Knesset and are often part of the governing coalition.

The Hassidic Jews are a source of controversy. They do not believe in the state of Israel; they do not work; they do not serve in the army; and their children in general do not study anything else except the Torah.

They do not believe in the establishment of the Israeli state because the ultraorthodox doctrine teaches that the state of Israel can only arise after the coming of Messiah. Since they believe this has not happened yet, the establishment of the Jewish state therefore is a sin. They do not work because they believe their job is to study Torah. They do not serve in the army because they go to Yeshivas – the religious schools, and those who go to Yeshivas are exempt from serving in the army. Their children do not study anything else in school except Torah because they believe Torah is of utmost importance and if you understand Torah well, you do not need to know anything else.

Many secular Jews resent the half-century-old political deal that allows some 28,000 men in ultraorthodox religious schools – Yeshivas -- to avoid compulsory military service, which is mandatory for most Israelis. What makes it more irritating to the secular Jews is the fact that the funding for those religious schools is from the Israeli government or the taxpayers' money.

The Hassidic Jews usually live together in their own neighborhoods. Those neighborhoods for the most part are ghettos, much like the ones Jews were forced to live in in East Europe in the 19th century, except the ghettos the Hassidic Jews live in today are of their own choice. The largest such ghetto is Mea Shearim in Jerusalem. The neighborhood is unique not only for its ghettolike appearance, but also for its huge warning signs and posters stating that women who are not dressed modestly are not allowed to enter the neighborhood. One of the signs states:

"To ladies passing through our neighborhood! We beg of you with all our hearts please do not pass through our neighborhood in immodest clothes. Modest clothes include: clothe blouse, with long sleeves, long skirt, no trousers. No tight-fitting clothes. Please do not violate the sanctity of our community, and do not disturb our children's education and our way of life as Jews faithful to G-d and his Torah" (See slides).

There are also other limitations to ultraorthodox Jews. At the beginning of year 2000, a ruling by leading rabbis of Israel's ultraorthodox community, based on Jewish law, prohibited their followers from suing the Internet – except for work. The rabbinic decision declared that use of the Web "burns souls" and leads impressionable young people astray (*The Israeli Culture Newsletter*, January 17, 2000).

Sabbath

In Israel, it is impossible for one to stay there for a week without noticing that Sabbath is an essential part of the Israeli's life. From sundown Friday to sundown Saturday, stores are closed and streets are deserted in Israel. If you happen to forget to buy food before sunset on Friday, you will have to fast unplanned for the next 24 hours.

During Sabbath, religious Jews are forbidden to turn on or off the radio and television, or to use telephone, or the answering machine, or to cook food, or to clean the house, or to take a bath or a show, or to switch on or off lights, or to travel.

To observe Sabbath, one has to prepare the food before sundown Friday. To accommodate people who need to have warm food, modern technology now has made it possible for religious Jews to keep warm their food with special electrical devices, so that they don't have to eat cold food during Sabbath. There are also automatic monitors that switch the lights on and off according to prearranged times, such that the religious doesn't have to ruin their eyesight by observing the age old tradition of reading by candlelight.

Kosher

For observant Jews, keeping kosher is a basic way of life. According to the traditions and laws of Judaism, dictated in the holy scriptures and handed down from generation to generation, observing the Jewish dietary laws is not something to be understood, but rather part of the commandments to be followed. In Israel, not all Jews keep kosher, but for many the very thought of mixing milk with meat is as foreign as celebrating the holidays of another religion (*The Israeli Culture Newsletter*, February 7, 2000).

For businesses in Israel's food industry, having a kosher factory, restaurant or hotel is a definite economic consideration.

The local observant Jewish population, as well as religious tourists, count for a substantial proportion of the business's income. While most of Israel's major manufacturers produce only kosher food products, and most of the major hotels are kosher, certain restaurants in the country have chosen not to be kosher in order to serve a wider variety of items on their menus.

In order to be certified as a kosher eating establishment, it is not enough to separate meat from milk in the kitchen. A valid kashrut certification is necessary, issued by the local religious authorities. This certificate will determine if the particular restaurant is kosher for milk products or for meat products, and whether that kashrut certification is acceptable for the holiday of Passover as well.

To obtain a kashrut certificate, a restaurant not only opens its doors for inspection, but in most cases must employ a masgiach – kashrut supervisor. This kashrut supervisor, appointed by the local rabbinate, is on the restaurant's payroll. It is the mashgiach's job to ensure that all food products that arrive at the restaurant are kosher, that strict separation of milk and meat utensils and foods is kept, and that there are no insects in the vegetables, rice or flour in use by the kitchen (*The Israeli Culture Newsletter*, February 7, 2000).

For a restaurant or hotel to be certified as kosher by the official religious authorities, it is not enough to keep a kosher kitchen inspected by a mashgiach. Strict observance of additional Jewish laws, even in other parts of the business, are required in order to keep the kashrut certificate.

Lack of a kashrut certificate would seriously endanger the economic viability of the business. According to the Israel Religious Action, the Orthodox establishment recently has been using the threat of revoking the kashrut certificate as a means of imposing their will, their prejudices and their anti-Reform attitude on the Israel commercial world (Israel Religious Action).

Kosher restaurants must be closed on Saturdays and on Jewish festivals. Hotels have to follow certain guidelines to keep their kashrut certificate, including employing non-Jews and using Sabbath clocks to control ovens.

Hotels and wedding halls that allow belly-dancing to take place at functions on their premises will lose their kashrut certificate.

Hotels that decorate Christmas trees or hold New Year's Eve parties will also lose their kashrut certificate.

In summer 2000, Omri Padan, the owner of the McDonald's franchise in Israel, was fined 80,000 shekels by the Haifa's District Labor Court for employing Jewish youth on the Sabbath, a case dating back to 1997. Padan believes the charges brought against him are not due to his neglect of teenagers' rights, but rather part of a much larger campaign of religious coercion in Israel. Omri Padan believes that the actions of the

Ministry have nothing to do with a desire to protect the rights of teenagers. He is sure that the actions are directly related to the fact that McDonald's sell cheeseburgers and other non-kosher products in Israel (*The Israeli Culture Newsletter*, June 19, 2000).

As CNN commented in one of its programs, "Beneath the cheeseburger debate is the issue of separation of religion and state… The line is blurred and crossed every day, spawning tensions between religious and non-religious Jews" (Feb. 15, 1997).

While the secular Jews fret about the growing power of the ultraorthodox Jews, religious Israelis worry about their materialistic compatriots. "Just look at the place. There are American businesses on every street," Kulick complains. Globalization, coupled with increased wealth, is turning Israel "into a typical bourgeois society," he says (Masci, 1998).

2. The Non-Jews

Israel's non-Jewish, primarily Arab communities, comprising some 20% of the population, have increased from 156,000 people in 1949 to some 1.2 million today (See slides).

Some of these Arabs consider themselves Israeli Arabs; some consider themselves Arab Israelis.

Their conditions are generally poorer than the Israeli Jews, but are better off than Arabs in the neighboring Arab countries.

The Educational level of the Israeli Arabs is generally lower than Israeli Jews. The unemployment rate for Israeli Arabs is higher than Israeli Jews. Some job requirements are phrased in a way that only Jews are qualified. Take pilot for instance. The requirement includes age, education, and English language. An Israeli Arab who aspires to become a pilot may qualify for the age requirement, but not education or the English language requirement since they learn Arabic and Hebrew in school and not so much English as their Israeli Jewish counterparts do.

3. The Minorities

i) The Bedouins

Bedouins are part of a group of nomadic Arab tribes scattered across the deserts of the Middle East, and the Israeli Bedouins live mostly in the Southern Negev Desert. Although many of them have settled down and live in houses, some still live in tents today (See slides).

Bedouins are very traditional and Bedouin women cover faces when they go outside their houses. Bedouins are great traders. They handmake colorful dresses and

other beautiful handicrafts and they bring them to the bazaars every week to trade (See slides). Bedouins are also great hosts and they are unusually hospitable.

Bedouins are world's renowned trackers and they are among those few Israeli Arabs who volunteer to serve in the army. As trackers they are included in the units which guard Israel's borders (See slides).

ii) The Druze

Although the Druze speak Arabic, they are not Muslims but the descendants of a sect which has its roots in Egypt some 900 year ago.

For centuries, the Druze have lived in the remote, isolated mountainous areas of Syria, Lebanon, and Israel. They have preserved their traditions and customs.

The exact religion of the Druze is a secret to the non-Druze. The Druze have intended to keep it that way. However, to many outsiders, the Druze religion is generally understood to be a combination of Judaism, Islam, Christianity, and Sufism, the particulars of the Druze religion have been passed down through generations and are known only to the faithful and their priests (See slides).

The Druze in Israel lead a quite prosperous life. One family the Fulbright Group visited has a large beautiful modern house with two stories (See slides).

One of the most successful stories of the Druze is an accomplished journalist, Rafik Halavi. Halavi is one of the chief editors of the most important television program in Israel. He edits the nightly Hebrew news on Israeli television.

One of the major reasons that the Druze are more successfully integrated into the Israeli society is that for the Druze, unlike the other Arabs, there isn't the identity problem. For the other Arabs living in Israel, they are caught in the middle of the Israeli-Arab conflict (See slides).

7. Conclusion

Israel is a nation of diverse people. There are people of different race, ethnicity, and religion. Even within the same religion, there are different degrees of conviction.

The vision of Israel's founders regards Israel as a secular democracy populated by Jews and governed by civil law. This vision is attractive both to the non-observant and religious Jews who regard Israel as a Western country. Very often these are people who came originally from Europe, value modernism and compose the wealthier segment of Israeli society.

The other vision wants Israel to be a more traditional society in which Jewish law and custom should govern not only the lives of the observant but also rule areas of public life. It appeals both to the ultraorthodox and to religious people with traditional values. The latter often are people who come from North Africa, the Middle East and Iran and compose the poorer elements of the Jewish population. Both they and the ultraorthodox feel suppressed by the elite and see religious and traditional values as an alternative system (Recknagel).

The development of relations between Israeli Arabs and Jews has been hindered by differences in language, religion and lifestyles as well as by the decades-long Arab-Israeli conflict. The two populations live side by side, with contacts on economic, municipal and political levels, but with little social interaction. The conflict between the secular Jews and the ultraorthodox Jews can be potentially explosive to the Israeli society and to the peace process in the Middle East.

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